CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY
IMAGE-MAKING AND FEMALE PATRONAGE IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

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By
Laura Sandoval
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Tracy Cooper, Thesis Advisor

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Marcia Hall, Secondary Reader

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will use a case study approach with the purpose of analyzing three female patrons from the early modern period, each serving as individual models for locating forms of identity and self-fashioning through the art they respectively commissioned. As women in unique positions of power, Isabella d' Este, the Marchioness of Mantua, Bess of Hardwick, the second wealthiest woman in Elizabethan England—second only to the queen—and Marie de' Medici, Queen of France, each constructed and maintained a visual program of self-identity through art and architecture. Through an examination of the patronage of these women from different geographical and chronological moments it becomes evident the way in which powerful women were especially capable of exploiting marital and familial circumstances.

Twentieth-century Renaissance scholarship has been greatly influenced by the study of individuality and by an effort to understand a uniquely Renaissance experience and manufacturing of identity. I have selected these three particular patrons, from three distinct countries and generations of the early modern period to draw out similarities in their collective experience as women in positions of power. The notion of constructing identity through patronage will be explored in an effort to locate the common factors that further illustrate the fact that in the Renaissance both the internal, subjective experience of self and the more objective experience of collective social, political and religious forces be considered to create a cohesive explanation of the Renaissance formation of identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will use a case study approach with the purpose of analyzing three

female patrons from the early modern period, each serving as individual models for

locating forms of identity and self-fashioning through the art they respectively

commissioned. As women in unique positions of power, Isabella d' Este, the

Marchioness of Mantua, Bess of Hardwick, the second wealthiest woman in Elizabethan

England—second only to the queen—and Marie de' Medici, Queen of France, each

constructed and maintained a visual program of self-identity through art and architecture.

Through an examination of the patronage of these women from different geographical

and chronological moments it becomes evident the way in which powerful women, as

daughters, widows and wives, were particularly capable of exploiting marital and familial

circumstances in their distinct efforts to construct and display a visual program that

would convey a message of self-identity.

Twentieth-century Renaissance scholarship has been greatly influenced by the

study of individuality and by an effort to understand a uniquely Renaissance experience

and manufacturing of identity. Since the 1860 publication of Jacob Burckhardt's *The

Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* scholars have been compelled to explore the

possibilities of a theory that posits Renaissance Italy as a period of reawakening the

concept of individual identity. Burckhardt argues:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness—that which was turned within as that which was turned without—lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation—only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all things of this world became possible. The subjective side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual individual and recognized himself as such.[1]

Subsequently, historians have continued to debate, challenge and redefine this argument, which has become a significant point of departure across many disciplines of the early modern period. One blatant challenge of the Burckhardtian concept of individualism has been Stephen Greenblatt, and his influential theory of Renaissance self-fashioning.[2] Greenblatt contends that in the sixteenth century the experience of self was not solely subjective and that identity was largely a construct. He argues: "There is considerable empirical evidence that there may well have been less *autonomy* in self-fashioning in the sixteenth century than before, and that family, state and religious institutions imposed a more rigid and far-reaching discipline upon their middle-class and

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[1] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 98.
[2] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

aristocratic subjects."[3] In recent scholarship Greenblatt's theory has been continually expanded upon and many scholars have begun to argue that "individualism itself is a construction, that indeed, the human self is in many ways nothing more than a fiction, and that it is above all what might be called Renaissance representations of the self as an individual, expressive subject that require explanation."[4]

Both sides of the debate on Renaissance identity have made their way into art historical scholarship, specifically through the subject matter of portraiture as a self-identifying construct of both patron and artist. It is no coincidence that an increase in portraiture occurred in direct correlation with a rising interest in humanist values and in fact, "the portrait in the Renaissance has long been connected with a particular notion of individuality that is held to have emerged in the early years of the fifteenth century and which provoked men and women to have their features recorded accurately for the first time since antiquity."[5] However, the physiognomic rendering of one's likeness is not the only agent by which a patron's identity can be captured and manufactured through the production of images. Renaissance patrons utilized a variety of mediums through which identity was articulated. In addition to the painted portrait, other expressive forces ranged from allegorical paintings of mythological subject matter to grand feats of architectural innovation—all intended in a carefully calculated manner to tell the story of the patron.

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[3] Ibid.

[4] John Martin, "Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe," *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1309-42.

[5] Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 9.

In 1984 Joan Kelly asked the now infamous question: Did women have a Renaissance?[6] In an attempt to answer this question, scholars have greatly responded to the task of digging up the significant contributions of female patrons that have largely lain dormant in dusty archives for centuries.[7] This study is indebted to the work of scholars such as Stephen Campbell, Alice Friedman and Deborah Marrow, who have contributed comprehensive works on each of the three patrons included in this paper.[8] However, Renaissance patronage studies remain saturated with interrogations of male patronage. One obvious response to the fact that scholarship weighs heavily on the side of male patrons is simply that there were far more men than women active in the patronage of art. The aforementioned scholars make significant claims that these three female patrons utilized their positions in society to not only become active patrons of art, but more importantly to construct a distinct image through their commissions.

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[6] Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," In *Women, History and Theory: Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[7] The vast majority of women and art has been dedicated to locating female artists, and it has been relatively recent that female patrons have been considered. For general reading on women in the history of art see Norma and Mary Garrard, ed. *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982). For a succinct overview of women in Italian Renaissance art see Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation and Identity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997). For the most comprehensive work on female patronage in Italy see Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, ed., *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2001). See also Cynthia Lawrence*,* ed., *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors and Connoisseurs* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

[8] See Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); Alice Friedman, "Architecture, Authority and the Female Gaze: Planning and Representation in the Early Modern Country House," *Assemblage* (1992): 40-61; and Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de'Medici* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982).

These particular patrons have here been chosen from three distinct countries and generations of the early modern period in order to draw out similarities in their collective experience as women in positions of power. The notion of constructing identity through patronage will be explored in an effort to locate the common factors that further illustrate the fact that in the Renaissance both the internal, subjective experience of self and the more objective experience of collective social, political and religious forces be considered to create a cohesive explanation of the Renaissance formation of identity.

CHAPTER TWO

ISABELLA D' ESTE

Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua (1474-1539) is one of the most widely

discussed patrons in the history of art, in large part due to the vast extant collection of

letters between Isabella and the many artists, patrons, friends, family members and other

associates with whom she was in frequent correspondence.[9] Self-described as an

"insatiable art collector," Isabella was indeed an avid patron of the arts, but it was her

compulsive and insistent participation in every aspect of the artistic process that has

promoted an enduring interest in Isabella among both historical and art historical

scholars. The first question to ask in approaching such a well-documented figure such as

Isabella d'Este is—are there any new ways of looking at her as a patron, ways that could

perhaps be applied to a new understanding of her involvement as a patron and the works

of art that resulted from such processes and involvement?

Her correspondence has been acknowledged as both appealing and valuable for

the fact that it "reveals both her powers—rhetorical, analytical, political—and her

limitations as a woman within a social structure organized around male privilege."[10]

From an art historical standpoint, the correspondence is critical for what the letters

specifically communicate about her demands as a patron and what these reveal about her

participation in the technical and creative processes that went into the execution of the

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[9] There have been several biographies written on Isabella d'Este. One of the most comprehensive to date is still Julia Cartright, *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua, 1474-1539: A Study of the Renaissance*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1903). See also George R. Marek, *The Bed and the Throne: The Life of Isabella d'Este* (New York, San Francisco and London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976).

[10] Deanna Shemek, "Isabella d'Este and the Properties of Persuasion," in *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700,* ed. Jane Couchman and Ann Crab (Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 126.

paintings Isabella commissioned for her first *studiolo* in the Castello di San Giorgio in Mantua (Figs. 1-5). One significant question that emerges is the extent to which this patron's involvement may have affected the finished product.

Whether it was collecting luxury goods for quotidian use, objects from antiquity, paintings or even the artists themselves to adorn her court, Isabella made careful use of the possessions she acquired and commissioned to construct and display a calculated identity; an identity that she went to great lengths to create and maintain. In analyzing the *studiolo* paintings within a framework that considers Isabella d'Este's role as a highly competitive Renaissance patron, what becomes evident is the extent to which her involvement affected the executed products, and the way in which these paintings were intentionally commissioned to function as both emblem and creator of identity.

In her work, *Renaissance Rivals*, Rona Goffen has examined the intense spirit of rivalry amidst networks of artists in Renaissance Italy. She writes:

> The Renaissance revival of antiquity is bound to the classical *agon*, an opposition or confrontation to surpass one's rival. The intention to surpass one's rivals, past and present, distinguishes the Renaissance from earlier periods of rebirth. At its most extreme, rivalry may devolve into hatred and bloodshed, more often, however, antagonism is sublimated in artistic endeavor. Renaissance rivalry implies parity or near-parity, which is to say, one's rival is essentially one's peer: one does not duel with an inferior.[11]

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[11] Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael and Titian* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 5-6.

Although Goffen primarily discusses Renaissance rivalry in terms of the competition among artists to secure patronage, patrons themselves were certainly on the other side of the coin—competing amongst each other to acquire the best and most modern artists and the most innovative and impressive commissions.[12] Just as Goffen commented on the nature of rivalry amongst artists as being driven by a sublimated antagonism, Isabella's competitive strategies too were underhanded, subtle, often sarcastic, but never outright vicious. However, it would seem as though no patron was exempt from her aggressive dealings, including family members and her own husband. In fact, she was perhaps most competitive with her kin. For example, in 1497, Isabella wrote to an agent in Venice concerning her father and the recently deceased Domenico di Piero, a well-known and well-respected jeweler with a formidable collection of antiquities, which he had recently left behind. She wrote:

> We have no doubt but that upon reaching Venice our illustrious father, who adores antiquities, will attempt to acquire the best of the di Piero collection; it is in our interest that you do everything possible to ensure that they have been crated and shipped to Mantua before his Excellency arrives.[13]

Valuable for its demonstration of rivalry among competing Renaissance patrons, this letter is valuale for the fact that the rival parties are father and daughter, and quite clearly

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[12] Although the concept of rivalry among artists in Renaissance Italy is now widely discussed, a comprehensive discussion of rivalry amongst Renaissance patrons has not yet been composed and is a vital aspect of this project.

[13] Clifford Brown, "A Ferrarese Lady and a Mantuan Marchesa: The Art and Antiquities Collections of Isabella d'Este Gonzaga (1474-1539)," in *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors and Connoisseurs*, ed. Cynthia Lawrence (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press), 64.

illustrates where Isabella likely acquired her shrewd sense of collecting and display,

attributes of her character that would continue to develop as she transitioned into her dual

role as wife to Francesco II Gonzaga and Marchesa of Mantua.

Isabella and Francesco were married in 1490 when Isabella was sixteen years of

age. From the onset of her marriage, Isabella began to grow accustomed to a lavish court

lifestyle. Her wish appears to have been her husband's command. Afforded her own

separate wing of the Castello San Giorgio, as early as 1491 plans were underway to

renovate and decorate her personal spaces—the *grotto* and her *studiolo*. By 1492, Andrea

Mantegna, who was already well accustomed to working at the court of the Gonzaga

family, offered his services to Isabella. At this early stage in the decoration, the "point

was to have 'a Mantegna,' and to commission works from other artists that would stand

'*in paragone*' with those of the Gonzaga's celebrated court artist," in both subject matter

as well as technical execution.[14] We can glean from the extensive correspondence

regarding the respective commissions that Isabella's two primary concerns with respect

to her *studiolo* paintings were speed of execution and the continuity with Mantegna's

initial contributions.

Isabella not only made significant attempts at controlling the subject matter of the

subsequent paintings, she also imposed specific provisions that would have greatly

limited the selective process for the artists that worked after Mantegna. In a letter dated

1504, for example, regarding her negotiations with Perugino, she wrote to the artist: "The

enclosed paper, and the thread wound round it together give the length of the largest

figure on Master Andrea Mantegna's picture, beside which yours will hang. The other

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[14] Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 117.

figures smaller than this can be as you please. You know how to arrange it. We beg you above all to hasten with the work; the sooner we have it, the more we shall be pleased."[15] The decoration of the original *studiolo* at the Castello, including the extensive time afforded to laborious negotiations, spanned a period of at least thirteen years, the final result of which included: Mantegna's *Mars and Venus* (Fig. 1) and *Pallas and the Vices* (Fig. 2); Perugino's *Battle of Chastity and Lascviousness* (Fig. 3); Lorenzo Costa's *Coronation of a Woman Poet* (Fig. 4) and *Comus* (Fig. 5).

In 1506, almost fifteen years after the initial plans were set into motion for the decoration of her first *camerino* at Castello San Giorgio, Isabella was finally—and eagerly—in the midst of its completion. The decoration for her husband Francesco's respective apartments was simultaneously underway at the new city palace of San Sebastiano. While various sources mention the extent to which a competitive nature drove certain aspects of Isabella's patronage, specifically with regard to the patronage of her respective family members, Molly Bourne has addressed the subject most explicitly:

> As scholarship increasingly points to the importance of family dynamics and *clientelismo* as determining factors in Renaissance society, it is becoming evident that each princely court was not a simple reflection of one ruler's personality, but the product of the numerous and often conflicting agendas promoted by a ruler, his consort and their many dependents. A comparison of Francesco and Isabella's

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[15] David S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Renaissance* (London: MacMillan, 1970), 139.

camerini also raises questions of taste, gendered space and conjugal competition.[16]

In September 1506, while Francesco was away on official papal duty in Bologna, Isabella wrote to her husband to inform him of the status of the work being done to construct and decorate his new rooms at the Palazzo di San Sebastiano. Possibly a bit envious of his exciting new project as hers was nearing completion, or perhaps simply in the spirit of conjugal competition, Isabella writes:

A few days ago I was in Your Excellency's house, and, as I wrote before, thought it most beautiful. You write that I am making fun of you, but this is not true, because if the rooms were not beautiful, I would remain silent; but, as they seemed to me to have such a lovely effect, I wrote this to you, and again I tell you that they are beautiful, and even more because your Excellency has learned from the example of my room, although I must confess that you have improved upon it.[17]

What exactly did Francesco learn from Isabella's *camerino*? One striking difference between the two spaces concerned the respective modes of overall decoration. Isabella's project spanned over a decade and reflected a desire on behalf of the patron to collect not only the finished paintings, but to also 'collect' multiple artists. Francesco's

[16] Molly Bourne, "Renaissance Husbands and Wives," *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy,* ed. Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2001), 95.
[17] Ibid, 93.

decoration relied on the hand of only one artist, Lorenzo Costa, and took only five years

to complete. The way in which Isabella's letter was worded directly implies that her

husband had not only seen her studio decoration, but that she had imparted a certain

knowledge from her experience and taste, in order to successfully decorate his own

respective space—or perhaps it was something more specific than this. An examination

of the little that is known about Francesco's *studiolo* decoration and of one painting by

Costa in particular, when compared to one of Costa's works commissioned by Isabella,

Coronation of a Woman Poet (Fig. 4), could potentially shed light on the nature of their

conjugal competition and perhaps clarify what exactly he had learned from his wife.

As early as 1504, after growing increasingly frustrated with her failure to acquire

works by Bellini and Perugino and exponentially frustrated in her impatient desire to

have the *studiolo* completed quickly, Isabella decided to seek out new artists.[18] Lorenzo

Costa, court artist to the Bentivoglio family in Bologna, came highly recommended to the

Gonzaga court. Although the fact was well documented that it was around this time that

Costa began work on a painting specifically intended for Isabella's *studiolo*, documentary

evidence divulging the subject matter has yet to be discovered. It is first mentioned in the

1542 Stivini inventory as a "painting by the hand of the late master, Lorenzo Costa,

which is to one side of the window, and has greenery and a coronation."[19] Although this

description is far from expressive, we might deduce that the painting in reference is

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[18] A letter of Isabella d'Este to Paride Ceresara, dated November, 10, 1504, illustrates the patron's frustrations with the lack of expediency in her artists. She wrote: "Messer Paride—"we do not know who finds the slowness of these painters wearisome, we who fail to have our *camerino* finished, or you who have to devise new schemes every day, which when, because of the bizarre ways of these painters, are neither done as soon nor drawn in entirety as we would have wished; and for this reason we have decided to try our new painters in order to finish it in our lifetime." Chambers, 1970, 140.

[19] Campbell, 2004, 193.

Costa's *Coronation.* This painting plays a vital role in the argument of the *camerini* rivalry between Isabella and her husband, specifically with respect to what it might bring to the discussion concerning the place of competition in the construction or display of self-identity through art.

By the nineteenth century, Costa's painting was confidently referred to as a depiction of the court of Isabella, ascribing the central figure as a representation of Isabella, illustriously crowned by Anteros, symbolizing the power of Virtue, on the basis of the patron's virtuous life. This identification of Isabella has persisted into modern scholarship and has become a significant point of contention among scholars. David Wilkins has confidently argued, "The [central] lady must be Isabella herself, who is evidently being rewarded for her virtuous life and whom the painter has represented, undoubtedly at Isabella's request, surrounded by the arts which adorned her courts." [20] In the life of Lorenzo Costa, Vasari contends that in the Palace of San Sebastiano, Costa produced a painting that showed "the marchioness Isabella portrayed life-size, with many ladies singing to various instruments, making a gentle harmony."[21] While this does seem to support the identification of Isabella as the primary figure, this could very well have been Vasari's own assumption. Regardless of whether or not the figure in question is an arguable likeness of Isabella, it was likely intended to representatively stand for her.

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[20] David Wilkins, "Woman as Artist and Patron in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *The Roles and Images of Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Publications, 1975). Although most recent scholars do agree that the central crowned figure is likely to at least represent Isabella, if it is not entirely meant to be a physiognomic portrait of the patron, most are careful to point out that no documentary evidence exists concerning the intended subject matter for the painting.

[21] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pitori scultore e architettori: nelle redazione del 1550 e 1568*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi. 6 vols. (Florence: Sansoni/Studio per Edizione Scelte, 1966-87).

By 1506 the final executed *Coronation* was completed and installed in Isabella's *studiolo*, and it is almost certain that Francesco would have seen it either in progress, finished, or both, before departing Mantua for Bologna in 1506, at which point Isabella wrote him regarding his own *camerino*. Unfortunately, Francesco's rooms at San Sebastiano have been dismantled and largely ignored in scholarship, especially by comparison to his wife's respective space. However, it is evident that a certain degree of mutual 'looking' was occurring between husband and wife. The tone of Isabella's letter to her husband could be explained by a number of motivations, including the possibility that Isabella perceived some sense of flattery in her husband's emulation. Francesco commissioned a representation of himself as Hercules ascending the mountain of Eternity from Costa, extolling the virtue of his military accomplishments, a reprisal of the same theme in Isabella's *Coronation*, which exalts her respective self-proclaimed greatest virtue—Knowledge. In this sense, each painting acts as a visual identifier of its respective patron, suggesting once again that the function of a *studiolo* and the images that adorned it was to display the self-interpreted identity of the inhabitant.

After fifteen years spent on her own *studiolo*, it is a distinct possibility that, as Molly Bourne suggests, Isabella was also threatened by Francesco's new project, specifically considering his move to the new palace, leaving Isabella in the Castello. Bourne considers this an important point when she asks: "Could it have been a sense of cultural competition that encouraged Francesco to locate his apartments not in the Castello, but in his new palace on the far side of the city? Moreover, in the eyes of contemporaries, did the distance between Francesco's San Sebastiano apartments and

those of Isabella in the Castello represent a rift between the two rulers, or a grander sense of courtly display, particularly when both sites were used on ceremonial occasions?"[22]

The notion that an implied sense of competition was occurring among, not only members of the same family, but also members of the same nuclear household, particularly in terms of *studiolo* decoration may say something significant about the function of the space itself. It is my supposition that documented instances of competition and rivalry amongst patrons can also serve to elucidate the identifying function of certain commissioned images as well, for such concern would not be afforded to an object that did not in some sense operate as an extension of the patrons themselves. With respect to works commissioned for *studiolo* decoration, the function of the image was further complicated by the nature of the space in which the paintings were to be displayed. As Stephen Campbell has pointed out, "scholars, clerics, princes and merchants had long had rooms designated as *studiolo, camerino, stanzino, scrittoio*, expressing the entitlement of elite males to privacy and to solitary reading and writing . . . yet by 1480, in the palace of the Medici, certainly no ordinary businessmen, it is clear that the private chamber had been transformed into a space of luxury."[23] This description of the *studiolo* describes a space, which seems to have been transformed from a private space of male learning, contemplation and business to one that began to incorporate a conspicuous public function of display. To consider Isabella's *studiolo* within the framework of Campbell's description, some fundamental questions come to mind: First, what did she deem the function of her 'private' space to be? Was this based on tradition and precedent or was the individual inhabitation of *studiolo* space markedly different for different patrons?

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[22] Bourne, 2001, 109-110.
[23] Campbell, 2004, 31.

What factors would have rendered such distinction? Second, how did the images that Isabella carefully commissioned function within this space? Was it her desire for the paintings to describe the function of the room or did they perhaps operate as extensions of a self she was essentially constructing for herself?

According to Campbell, what seems to separate an earlier concept of the *studiolo* from a later one, especially at court, is a "particular selectiveness and calculated presentation, the sense that these are objects with a particular closeness to their owner, which can thus stand as a synecdochic representation of the principal occupant."[24] This assertion is supported by several letters concerning Isabella's individual commissions, confirming that she was a highly meticulous patron who attempted to control, in an extremely detailed fashion, almost every element of the visual dialogue that was to encompass her space. One of the most frequently cited examples of Isabella's minute specificity is the *invenzione* for the *Battle of Chastity and Lasciviousness* (Fig. 3) which she had prepared and drawn up in a letter to Perugino in 1503, originally accompanied by a drawing of the desired program and a contract. The letter begins with the patron expressing her interest in a "battle of Chastity against Lasciviousness, that is Pallas and Diana fighting manfully against Venus and Cupid"[25] and after a thorough account of every detail she desired, she concluded by addressing the artist, stating that she would be:

Sending you all these details in a small drawing, so that with both the written account and the drawing you will be able to consider my wishes in this matter.

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[24] Ibid, 31.

[25] D.S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1971), 135-138.

But if it appears to you that there are too many figures for one painting, it is left to you to reduce them as seems fitting, as long as nothing is removed from the principal theme, which is those first four: Pallas, Diana, Venus and Amor. If no inconvenience occurs I shall consider myself satisfied. You are free to reduce the figures, but do not add anything to them. Please be content with this arrangement.[26]

The degree to which Isabella sought control over Perugino's work, as indicated by her precise instructions, does not however provide a conclusive representation of her nature as a patron. By comparing the Perugino letter with other correspondence that negotiate commissions for her *studiolo*, it is revealed that control over subject matter was not Isabella's only motivating factor, and she in fact seemed to have handled her artists on a case-by-case basis, depending largely on just how much she wanted their hand represented in her collection. For instance, her dealings with Bellini reveal a much less controlling patron. The correspondence between the patron and artist in this case is "important for it reveals the iconographic bias of both Bellini and Isabella. From its tone much can be learnt of character, of the special skills of individual agents and of the raw mechanics of patronage."[27]

As early as 1496, several years before even the first of Mantegna's works had been installed, Isabella was in contact with Bellini in hopes of acquiring a *storia* for her *studiolo*. Though ten years and over forty letters worth of correspondence would ensue, Isabella never received the commission she judiciously sought from Bellini, although the

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[26] Ibid, 135-138.
[27] J.M. Fletcher, "Isabella d'Este and Giovanni Bellini's 'Presepio,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 113 (1971): 703.

interaction between the artist and patron in this case is invaluable for what it can tell us,

not only about the often inconsistent terms by which Isabella operated in her negotiations,

but also about the concern for *paragone* in the *studiolo* program.[28] On June 25, 1501

Michele Vianello, a Venetian art agent and collector, wrote to Isabella concerning her

specific request:

> …about the story your Ladyship gave him, words cannot express how badly he
> has taken it, because he knows Your Ladyship will judge it in comparison with
> the work of Master Andrea (Mantegna), and for this reason he wants to do his
> best. He said that in the story he cannot devise anything good out of the subject at
> all, and he takes it as badly as one can say, so that I doubt whether he will serve
> Your Excellency as you wish. So if it should seem better to you to allow him to
> do what he likes, I am most certain that Your Ladyship will be very much better
> served.[29]

In response, she writes:

> If Giovanni Bellini is so unwilling to do this story as you write, we are content to
> leave the subject to his own judgment, so long as he paints some ancient story or
> fable with a beautiful meaning. We should be very glad if you would urge him to

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[28] For a useful discussion on the correspondence between Isabella and Bellini, see note 8.
[29] Chambers, 1971, 127.

start on this work, so that we have it within the time he has estimated, and sooner if possible.[30]

What this particular exchange illustrates, especially when compared to the negotiations with Perugino, is that in some instances her control over the iconographical program of the *studiolo* as a whole came second to her desire for the inclusion of a particular hand—in this case Bellini's. Moreover, considered in conjunction with a letter concerning the completion of Perugino's *Battle of Chastity and Lasciviousness*, it elucidates the various degrees to which she afforded different artists creative license in their work and to what extent she entrusted them to stand up visually to Mantegna. In a letter to Agostino Strozzi in 1505, two years after the initial *invenzione* was given to Perugino, Isabella expressed that after hearing great praises for the *fantasia* of her commissioned work, she was eager for its completion and delivery, and to "let us hope that it will be of a kind that can stand in comparison [*al paragone*] with the others."[31] In her dealings with Bellini on the other hand, while he himself expressed concern over the fact that his work would hang accordingly, visually competing with the work of his brother-in-law, in her response Isabella conspicuously fails to comment on this particular concern, and simply affords him the freedom to do as he pleases so long as he remains within the genre she assigns.

Most of the scholarship which focuses on Isabella's involvement as a patron is based primarily on her intense attempt at controlling the subject matter and *invenzioni* of

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[30] Ibid, 127.
[31] February 1, 1505: Agostino Strozzi was asked to carefully monitor the progress made by Perugino so that the painting would be as well designed as the other pictures in her room: "ch'el habbi ad essere de sorte ch'el potrà stare al parangone de li altri," ASMn, Busta 2994, Libro 17, c.68v. in Braghirolli, 1873, 248. as quoted in Campbell, 2004, 296.

her *studiolo* commissions, resulting in exhaustive iconographical interpretations. There is, however, a distinct lack of discussion in the research regarding the extent to which she also sought to control the overall process of execution. As the aforementioned letter regarding *paragone* demonstrates, although Isabella may have been interested in collecting a number of artists hands for her *studiolo*, she was nevertheless highly concerned with a visual continuity in technique and style—a visual style that consistently seemed to go back to Mantegna.

By 1505, both of Mantegna's contributions to Isabella's *studiolo*, *Mars and Venus* (Parnassus) and *Expulsion of the Vices* (Minerva) (see Figs. 1 and 2) were complete and visibly commissioned and executed as a coherent pair. Isabella's interest in Mantegna was likely due to the artist's reputation as engaged in a dialogue of antiquity, an idea she herself commented upon in 1498, referring to Mantegna as a 'professore de antiquita.'[32] It can be argued with a veritable degree of certainty that one of Isabella's primary concerns with the program of her *studiolo* decoration was for it to embody and project an intellectual engagement with the knowledge of antiquity. Stephen Kolsky has noted: "by means of the *studiolo* and *grotta*, Isabella was able to pursue her policy of creating a cultural identity for herself, over which she would have great control."[33] So concerned with her own understanding of Latin, Isabella even called the well-respected courtier Mario Equicola to court to serve as her own personal tutor and chief advisor.

Surpassed perhaps only by the Medici, more has been published on the patronage of Isabella d'Este than almost any other Renaissance patron, and certainly more than on

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[32] Clifford M. Brown with Anna Maria Lorenzoni and Sally Hickson, *Per dare qualche splendore a la gloriosa città di Mantua: Documents for the Antiquarian Collection of Isabella d'Este* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2002), 131.
[33] Stephen Kolsky, "An Unnoticed Description of Isabella d'Este's Grotta," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institutes* 52 (1989): 232-5.

any other female patron from any period in art history, significantly due in large part to the preservation of the Mantuan Archives. As a patron, Isabella was exacting and meticulous, often to an obsessive degree and she was motivated by an extreme sense of urgency in the completion of her *studiolo*. However, due to several factors the *studiolo* paintings were commissioned and completed over a significant span of time, in a manner that—according to Stephen Campbell—"involved the intervention of a number of artists, literati and other agents, and because there is much in the paintings themselves that cannot be explained according to an illusory familiarity with the patron and preconceptions about what their patron would have wanted it is neither useful nor even historically responsible to reduce the paintings to the operations of a single controlling will or initiative."[34] Through the surviving portraits, the immense corpus of surviving letters and the paintings that adorned her personal space, we are able to extract a likeness of Isabella as a Renaissance woman and as a patron. While Isabella's *studiolo* has been interpreted as a spatial expression of humanist ideologies, it is as much a spatial expression of Isabella herself, an idea that becomes similarly evident in the form of domestic space with Bess of Hardwick and her most ambitious building endeavor— Hardwick Hall.

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[34] Campbell, 2004, 197.

CHAPTER THREE

BESS OF HARDWICK

It was perceived at the first, when men sought to cure mortality by fame, that

building was the only way . . . The plain and approved way that is safe and yet

proportionable to the greatness of a monarch is not rumor or heresay, but the

visible memory of himself in the magnificence of goodly and royal buildings.[35]

In 1594 Sir Francis Bacon commented that buildings have retained the

capacity to render and represent the power of those associated with their presence and

that this has been a consistent current since man first began constructing. As an

important, and often overlooked, patron of the early modern period, Bess of Hardwick

has been recognized for her participation in the commission and design of her most

autonomous structure—Hardwick Hall (Figs. 6-7). Elizabethan country houses were not

simply large and lavish rural get-aways for urban dwelling aristocrats—they were visual

and spatial representations of their respective patrons.[36] The initial goal of this chapter is

to address the function of these structures and the various reasons why they were afforded

such an immense amount of time, attention and most importantly, wealth. A close

analysis of Bess' patronage demonstrates the way in which she utilized these grand

architectural projects to formulate her own unique identity through a successful display of

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[35] Sir Frances Bacon, *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon, Including all his Occasional Works, Namely Letters, Speeches, Tracts, State Papers, Memorials, Devices and All Authentic Writings Not Already Printed Among his Philosophical, Literary or Professional Works, Newly Collected and Set Forth in Chronological Order with a Commentary Biographical and Historical*, vol. 1, ed. James Spedding (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890).
[36] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

wealth and power—an idea that is most successfully illustrated in her final and most important building project of Hardwick Hall.

The design and structure of Hardwick Hall must be analyzed within a framework that recognizes the social conventions consistently challenged and often outright ignored in the final monument—visually and literally rendering alternative meanings in the articulation of power through architecture. Therefore, a study of her patronage requires a careful consideration of the social and historical context to which she belongs. Certain factors which must be taken into account include the patriarchal social structure of Elizabethan England, ironically ruled by a powerful female monarch; the social institution of marriage as a definitive factor in the formation of Bess' activity as an architectural patron; and finally, the extent to which her female gender imposed upon her activities as a patron. These issues play an important role in understanding this patron's challenge to construct her own image and identity in architectural form.

In her 1992 article, "Architecture, Authority, and the Female Gaze: Planning and Representation in the Early Modern Country House," Alice Friedman provides an important analysis of Hardwick Hall. Employing a methodology that considers architecture as a medium by which form and function together construct a system that produces and embodies meaning, Friedman's aim is to "reexamine the stylistic shifts through the lens of convention and unconventionality in planning techniques, gender relations and household structure."[37] A detailed approach to understanding the power structure commanded and constructed by Bess of Hardwick is incomplete, however, without a close analysis of the greater political power structure created by Queen

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[37] Alice Friedman, "Architecture, Authority and the Female Gaze: Planning and Representation in the Early Modern Country House," *Assemblage* 18 (1992), 41.

Elizabeth I. In order to recognize the ways in which Bess of Hardwick was unconventional in her own right, one must ostensibly recognize the social and historical system within which operated. Therefore in addition to considering the overall cultural climate of Elizabethan England, it is also necessary to account for details specific to the authority of Elizabeth I, particularly with respect to the identity and persona that she herself systematically created and maintained, as well as the structure of her own household.

The relationship between dependence and domination was complicated in Elizabethan culture by the fact that every other aspect of society was based on patriarchal rule except for the monarchy, the most important power. Upon the death of Queen Mary Tudor in November 1558, Elizabeth I assumed the throne in January of 1559—unmarried and sole monarch. This was a situation marked by tension and apprehension for several reasons. An unmarried queen, first of all ruled without the presence of a male authority even in the lesser role of consort than king, and so had to negotiate that lack through social stratagems with her parliament. Perhaps more importantly, she could not produce a legitimate male heir without a husband, although royal issue was not simply a problem of gender as her father's situation reminds us. It has been observed that a sole female ruler disrupted a rigidly maintained and specifically gendered hierarchy of power. Louis Montrose commented, "As the female ruler of what was, at least in theory, a patriarchal society, Elizabeth incarnated a contradiction at the very center of the Elizabethan sex/gender system . . . The woman to whom *all* Elizabethan men were vulnerable was

Queen Elizabeth herself."[38] Despite the pressure from her court and the significant

number of marriage proposals, Elizabeth I—England's most eligible bachelorette, never

married and never bore children. Though the so-called Virgin Queen was arguably a

successful monarch for close to forty-five years without ever giving into the immense

political pressure to marry and produce a male heir, she tread a very fine line between her

gender and her authority, a duality that she manipulated through the iconographical

representations of her body, which she produced, controlled and maintained.

Leah Marcus has convincingly argued that Queen Elizabeth's virginity "exempted

her from most of the recognized categories of female experience, allowing her to preserve

her independence while simultaneously tapping into the emotional power behind the

images of wife and mother through fictionalized versions of herself."[39] The

materialization of this composite queen was expressed through a dual nature of her very

publicized body. She appealed to an incarnation of her natural, corporeal body as innately

female (and thus feeble) and her political body, which embodied the strength and virility

of a king. Elizabeth I never denied that her natural body was female. Quite to the

contrary, she strategically emphasized the weaknesses of her actual female body; an

attempt to "corner the market" on deprecating her own gender. If she herself claimed

acceptance of the debilities of a female body, she was not as vulnerable to male criticisms

of her femaleness. In relegating her 'femaleness' to her earthly body, she further

emphasizes the very maleness of her body politic. In her famous Armada address of

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[38] Louis Adrian Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), 50.

[39] Leah S. Marcus, "Shakespeare's Comic Heroines, Elizabeth I and the Political Uses of Androgyny," in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 138.

1588, she states: "I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a King, and of a king of England too."[40] Gradually throughout her reign, Elizabeth succeeded in masculinizing her own epithets. Early in her reign she was referred to as 'The Queen our Sovereign Lady' a proclamation reserved for her predecessor Mary Tudor as well. This was quickly replaced, however, with more gender-neutral titles, such as 'The Queen's Majesty.' Gender neutrality was eventually replaced by an alignment with male titles, such as 'Monarch and Prince Sovereign' or the simple self-reference as 'Prince.' These masculine titles undoubtedly would have functioned as reminder to the male nature of her body politic, but they also contributed to the androgynous nature of Queen Elizabeth's authority.

The term 'Prince' also conveys the idea of the queen embodying a young male heir. As opposed to producing her own male heir, she symbolically becomes him. On the other hand, as Louis Montrose argues: "By fashioning herself into a singular combination of Maiden, Matron and Mother, the queen transformed the normal domestic life-cycle of an Elizabethan female into what was once a social paradox and a religious mystery."[41] It should be noted, however, that although she allowed her body politic to be incarnated in female forms, there was a specific difference she was trying to convey—demarcating herself from other women. Elizabeth's rule therefore was "not intended to undermine the male hegemony of her culture."[42] It was in fact not in her best interest to disrupt or break down accepted social structures. In an address to Parliament from 1563, the Queen wrote: "I think marriage best for a private woman, yet I do strive with myself to think it not meet

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[40] Ibid, 138.
[41] Montrose, 1988, 50.
[42] Ibid, 50.

for a Prince."[43] Elizabeth I carefully exploited the very fact that she was an anomaly,

aligning herself with the established social conventions of both genders so as to maintain

the support of a patriarchal court and culture, without herself having to abide by the

cultural demands of her natural female body. It was not only by means of verbal rhetoric

that Queen Elizabeth constructed her identity. Through royal portraiture the queen

"recognized that though she faced grave difficulties in creating an image of authority as a

female sovereign, she knew precisely the significance of her own body and how her

appearance could serve her as a means of control."[44]

In her 1992 article Alice Friedman argued that, with respect to the study of the

early modern country house, no significant analysis had taken into consideration the role

of the patron and the impact of conscious and unconscious goals on the design and

execution of the structures themselves.[45] While my research has shown that she is

categorically correct in the sense that her work has been groundbreaking in looking at

Hardwick Hall specifically as a socially constructed space that takes into account that the

"conventions of representation in architecture encoded by political and gender

differences,"[46] Pam Wright has made similar connections in analyzing the structural and

physical space of the Queen's Privy Chamber.[47] The tradition of the Privy Chamber is

one embedded in the early modern concern for privacy, especially amongst the upper

classes. Traditionally the royal residences were divided into two main areas of public and

private domain, both of which would have a mélange of various types of domestic

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[43] Ibid. 51

[44] Friedman, 1992, 47.

[45] Friedman, 1992, 40-61.

[46] Ibid, 43.

[47] Pam Wright, "A Change in Direction: The Ramifications of a Female Household, 1558-1603," in *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, ed. David Starkey (London and New York: Longman Group, 1987).

workers and higher status personnel. With the elevation of the monarchy, the private

chambers were further subdivided under Henry VII, creating spaces of intimate privacy

for the king and only a very select chosen few who would have been granted access. This

subdivision of the royal apartments rendered the space significantly political, not only for

the fact that it was a tremendous honor and symbol of importance to be a member of the

Privy Chamber, it also functioned as an administrative space. Obviously, through the

patriarchal tradition of male rule, the Privy Chamber traditionally consisted of male

members. This convention was significantly disrupted by Mary Tudor's accession in

1553. Due to the domestic proximity to the royal bedchamber, a female monarch could

not be served by a Privy Chamber of men. Therefore the most coveted positions in the

royal household went to the women. Aside from the political and administrative

ramifications of such a structural shift, it also stands to support Friedman's notion that

architecture and the manipulation of space can literally upset and/or reconstruct

established systems of power. Thereby in the case of both Elizabeth I and Bess of

Hardwick, architectural space became the vehicle by which power and identity is

established. This socially manufactured hierarchy of power rendered by the opportunities

and the limitations of architectural space would have been communicated to everyone in

the household simply by their accessibility to particular spaces within the structure. Bess

had a close and complicated relationship with the queen, and most significantly, Bess had

direct access to bear witness to a matriarchal household and thus certain parallels can be

made between Bess and the queen in terms of the way in which each created, maintained

and manipulated their respective spaces.

Friedman argues: "As a woman who headed her own household, Bess of Hardwick was an anomaly like the queen herself. Elizabeth I compensated for this by creating a royal mythology in many forms, yet for a private citizen like Bess of Hardwick, the range of choices for self-representation was much more limited."[48] It would be inappropriate for Bess of Hardwick to have represented herself in any of the grandiose modes that were necessary for the representation of the queen's body politic, however it is perhaps precisely *because* Bess did not have to construct a mythologized persona that she was in fact a greater anomaly than the queen. She was a woman in an earned position of power who could disrupt conventions in both architectural design and the structuring of her household. Elizabeth I pointed away from her actual physical female body by aligning herself with powerful and constructed identities and emphasizing her body politic, one she associated with the power of mythological identities. Bess didn't have to create a distraction from her own physical presence as the queen did. In fact, once widowed for the fourth and final time and as head of her own household, she was able to embrace and highlight her position as an authority in her own right—and her major contribution was to implement a new and innovative architectural convention through which her power could be displayed and emphasized. In this sense we see a distinct feminized relationship between form and function emerge at Hardwick Hall.

We understand Elizabeth's support and propagation of an enduring patriarchal society for the security of her own power structure. Bess of Hardwick, on the other hand did not have to maintain a patriarchal hierarchy in her own household—and in fact she

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[48] Friedman, 1992, 47.

did not. This too was a factor in the design of Hardwick Hall. The plan of Hardwick was "strictly based on the demands of the ceremonial which was to be carried on within its walls. From the moment that Bess would have risen in the morning until she went to bed at night, her servants performed a ritual around her which went on whether Bess was in the room or not."[49] To what extent, than, are these types of household functions a consideration in the design of Hardwick and can we identify Bess' patronage as marked by gender? Friedman contends that patronage "bears the stamp of gender, placing the female patron in the unusual role of subject in the works of art and architecture that she commissions."[50] I find this to be a crucial point that deserves further exploration with respect to female patrons of architecture; architecture as a medium specifically, because it provides a unique circumstance by which the patron is subject, as Friedman suggests, as well as spectator, rendering a dual nature of spectatorship where the female patron is at once both the viewer and the viewed, which is all the more complex for the fact that Bess herself constructed and therefore controlled this exceptional situation—thus complicating the traditional feminist ideology of the penetrating male gaze. At Hardwick, the traditional patriarchal structure of authority, and the visual dialogue that this authority participated in, was turned upside down by a powerful matriarchal authority and it was visually expressed through the very structure that housed and promoted it.

Mark Girouard has convincingly argued that understanding the social significance of an Elizabethan country house is not possible without first recognizing the direct correlation between land ownership and power, but that land was "little use without one or more country houses on it. If land provided the fuel, a country house was the engine

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[49] David N. Durant, *Bess of Hardwick: Portraits of an Elizabethan Dynast*y (New York: Athenium, 1978), 180.
[50] Friedman, 1997, 125.

which made it effective. It was an image-maker, the size and pretensions of which were an accurate index of the ambitions—or lack there of—of their owners."[51]Although the sense of competition to create the bigger and better structure was undoubtedly prevalent, there were conventions to consider; conventions that if deviated from too drastically could have potentially disrupted a tradition of representing a very specific and long established male hierarchy of power. While the form of these structures represented a male-headed household structure, they were inevitably participating in a dialogue concerning a greater social structure as well—one that powerful and wealthy male patrons would not have wanted to disrupt. Bess was a product of her age, and in as much, a product of her close associations with the most powerful woman of the age. The consistent accusations of Bess as overbearing, treacherous, unfeeling in her self promotion for the sake of acquiring wealth, are not surprising considering the fact that she quite literally had to construct a space within the patriarchal structure and tradition that allowed her to take advantage of her status, flaunt her acquisitions and proudly display her role of female authority. Country houses embodied a tradition of ritual—ritual that mimicked the ceremonial proceedings of the royal household and that provided each member of the household with a strict role in the hierarchy of performance that went on within these Elizabethan houses. Inherently important to this tradition was the great hall. In the medieval period, the hall not only participated in the ceremony of demonstrating power, it participated in the management of power. The centralized hall of the medieval tradition ensured that movement and accessibility throughout the house was controlled. As the feudal order changed and the need for fortified structures and military defense for

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[51] Girouard, 1994, 3.

land subsided, the centralized hall became a symbol for the tradition of controlled male authority within a household structure.

At Hardwick, the hall is stripped—both in form and function—of its traditional associations. In terms of form, this is obvious—it is a cross-hall plan that runs directly across the center of the house. In terms of function, the lower hall is given over to lower servants and visitors. In 1594 Bess altered the design of the lesser staircase, with construction well under way, in order to create a separate dining space for her close female servants; whereas her gentleman servants and like visitors dined in the Low Great Chamber of the first floor. David Durant explicitly discusses this alteration in form as marked by an intentional gendered function. He states: "There is no doubt where her priorities lay. This small dining room would supposedly let the women dine separately from the gentleman in the low great chamber and gave them a certain superiority, which would have been the intention in this matriarchal household. It also emphasized the importance of Bess at the top of the pyramid."[52]

Bess was an avid patron of architecture for the better part of her adult life. Fortunate, or smart enough, to marry into extensive and important land ownership in at least three of her four marriages, Bess had the unique opportunity as a woman to not only acquire enough land and wealth to eventually build her own structure and empire at Hardwick, she also seemed to have played vital roles in the design and building of several of her marital homes. In 1547 Bess married her second husband, Sir William Cavendish—an important match for Bess in terms of wealth and status, but also for the fact that he would be the father of all six of her surviving children. Although her first

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[52] Durant, 1978, 181.

marriage was not exceptionally profitable, she brought a modest income and the full one-third of her dowry rights. Her marriage to Cavendish would also prove to be an important moment in her life in terms of building projects. In or around1549 Sir William Cavendish purchased land in Derbyshire in order to construct the country home of Chatsworth, not far from Bess' ancestral home at Hardwick.

In 1552 building began on Chatsworth and until Sir William Cavendish's death in 1557, it would primarily be Bess who oversaw the design and progress. In design, Chatworth consisted of a compact plan, an immense height and a turreted outline. Girouard describes Chatsworth as "the first expression of a passion for high buildings that stayed with Bess of Hardwick throughout her life."[53] After the death of her second husband and yet another lengthy battle with the estate, Bess acquired her marital properties and quickly married Sir William St. Loe in 1558. It was through this her third marriage that Bess began to maintain a greater presence at court and was officially named Lady of the Queen's Privy Chamber in 1559. It was also at this time that St. Loe encouraged Bess to begin alterations on his own ancestral home as well as to resume building at Chatsworth: "Aware of, and amused by her growing obsession with building, he teased her affectionately, calling her the 'chief overseer of my works.'"[54] Bess held a continuously vested interest in the ongoing building of Chatsworth even after the death of her third husband. In 1565 she added a third floor consisting entirely of state rooms suitable for a monarch, an absolutely vital function in this period for any country house and a consideration which would perhaps later impact form and function at Hardwick, as

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[53] Girouard,1983, 116.

[54] Mary S. Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick: Empire Builder* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 150.

the queen frequently traveled to the country homes of her courtiers. After leaving her fourth and final husband, George Talbot, the 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, Bess moved back into her ancestral home at Old Hardwick, the renovations for which were well underway by 1587.

In 1590 Bess implemented the start of the most ambitious building project she had yet to embark upon, New Hardwick Hall. The great hall was a conventional focal point of the traditional English country house and at Hardwick Hall, perhaps the most fundamental innovation and departure from tradition. Girouard remarks that the unconventional cross-hall plan had two obvious advantages—"What, as used in medieval time, was essentially an asymmetrical feature could now be neatly incorporated into a symmetrical plan. And the cross-hall was a useful means towards achieving a compact building, for the rest of the house could be built two rooms or more thick with no internal courtyard. The fact that such halls featured prominently in the publications of Serlio and Palladio meant that they were almost bound to be adapted for use in England in the end."[55]

Alice Friedman argues that Hardwick Hall represents a break from convention, a defiance of tradition made possible by Bess' lack of gendered restrictions in preserving such typologies for a country house. She further contends that the actual implementation of such a break was coupled with Robert Smythson's interest and ability to render a specifically Palladian form, a form which Friedman argues operates as an intentional solution to a conventional insufficiency for the expression of a specifically female power. It is generally agreed upon that Bess and her architect-builder defied convention, and her

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[55] Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Architecture of the Elizabethan Era* (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1967), 153.

unique position as a very wealthy woman in a position of great power quite possibly played a factor in her decisions of design and form as they would render the function of her household. However we cannot take Bess entirely out of the context of her own time and place. Bess would have been systematically engrained with and well-versed in the social factors of her culture—factors which rendered her powerful in the first place, factors that, if responded to prudently, could make her even more powerful and factors that could just as easily relinquish her and her family of such power. Although Friedman briefly mentions that Bess was protective of her status and concerned with securing the status of her family, she fails to consider that her motivations for innovation, as well her potential caution towards a drastic break from convention, could have gone beyond simply her gender.[56]

Elizabethan country houses such as Hardwick, visually rendered the power of the respective owner, "towering over the landscape, demanding attention and admiration, they were clear pointers to the rage to advertise one's wealth and status."[57] Bess of Hardwick knew and understood the patriarchal society she came to power through in the first place. The extent to which she was willing to go in order to secure the status of her heirs, including her fervent desire to see her granddaughter Arabella succeed the throne is well documented.[58] The greater function of Hardwick Hall was to embody the autonomous identity of the patron herself, as head of her own matriarchal structured household and as worthy competitor in the circle of her social equals, who were themselves building their own image makers. In altering the traditional patriarchal

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[56] See Friedman, 1992, 40-61.
[57] Adrian Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist: Four Centuries of Country House Visiting* (New York: Harry & Abrams, 1999), 17.
[58] For more information on Bess' ambitions for her family see Mary S. Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick: Empire Builder* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005)

structure of the great hall, she created a new dialogue of power through form, one that literally elevated the space of her own authority and heightened the grandeur of ceremonial performance.

Elizabethan country houses served as emblems of power and personal identity. Every aspect of the household function was determined by the control and display of authority and worth. As such, the form and aesthetic of the structure fostered—literally housed—this spectacle of power. As a patron, Bess was truly infatuated not only with building, but perhaps more so with manipulating the power of household function.

Hardwick Hall, in design, implementation and finished form, participated in and contributed to an architectural dialogue, through which builders, patrons and the structures themselves made significant social statements. By understanding how previous and contemporary structures operated and by considering their respective patrons as both subject and creator, we are able to consider the extent to which gender was an operating force to both the form and function of Hardwick Hall. Bess was an invested patron, specifically with regard to her final and most ambitious project. For up until New Hardwick Hall, the building she had taken part in, regardless of the extent of her control, was for structures built or rebuilt with her respective husbands. Bess' experience as a patron at New Hardwick Hall was the first independent endeavor and therefore the first visual expression, not only of her wealth or power, but of her newly acquired autonomy—in this sense, Hardwick Hall is the greatest and perhaps most accurate self-portrait of Bess that we have. As was so with both Isabella d 'Este and Bess of Hardwick before her, Marie de' Medici will be explored as a final example of an enthusiastic patron

of both art and architecture and the way in which she treated both as a means to establish

and display her rightful position as the Queen of France.

CHAPTER FOUR

MARIE DE' MEDICI

The works commissioned by Marie de' Medici survive as emblems of one of the most calculated constructions of identity in the history of art. Like Isabella, Marie was married into her powerful role as female consort and was thus susceptible to the precarious circumstances of female leadership in the age of the Salic Law.[59] Born in Florence to Francesco I de'Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany and Johanna Archduchess of Austria, Marie was educated and exposed to the process and products of her family's patronage. As she grew older and with the realization that marriage would be her only avenue to a position of power, Maria commented that she would "either marry a king or else join a convent…this stance, a shrewd manipulation of the options opened to her, earned her a reputation of being opinionated and stubborn."[60]

In 1600 her wish was granted and a match was arranged between Maria and King Henri IV of France; though she was forced to renounce any rightful claim of Medici succession. Therefore, unlike Isabella d' Este's automatic ascension to *rightful* power through her marriage, Maria de' Medici was far removed from her native country and family. Her circumstance necessitated the requirement to identify herself not only as a capable Queen, but as a legitimate and rightful ruler of France as well. In this chapter, in addition to analyzing Marie within the political and social context of seventeenth century France, Peter Paul Rubens' *Life of Marie de' Medici* cycle, commissioned by the Queen

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[59] For a more in-depth discussion of the Salic law see Craig Taylor, "The Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages," *French Historical Studies* (2006): 543-564.

[60] Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de'Medici* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 6.

in 1621, will be considered in order to illustrate that Marie was constructing a personal iconography through these images as a way in which to reassert her legitimate position of political authority. Originally intended as decoration for her new Luxembourg palace, this set of twenty-four paintings participate in a greater discourse of political and artistic tradition rooted in French and Italian Renaissance ideology and "it is within this context that the Medici cycle must be viewed, for the paintings are in fact the magnificent culmination of a programmed design of Medici dynastic imagery, fused with a profoundly understood expression of Medici political idealism shaped by the heritage of the formal rhetoric of the Golden Age."[61]

The first ten years of her time spent in France, Marie was largely occupied with her new role as wife and mother.[62] She bore six children, thus ensuring an heir to the throne. However, several factors from this early period of her time in France contributed to a state of uncertainty for the Queen's position. First, there was the presence of her husband's widely recognized mistress, Henriette d'Entragues, who maintained a unique position at court even after Marie's arrival in France. Henry IV was notoriously susceptible to the charms of women, and Henriette has been described as "slim, elegant and beautifully made," while Marie was described as "stout, robustly healthy and not very intelligent," a common statement throughout early twentieth century scholarship.[63] The notion of Marie as a passive leader originated in the seventeenth century, a period in which political factions intended to undermine the power of female leadership in

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[61] Susan Saward, *The Golden Age of Marie de' Medici* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 7.
[62] For a more in depth examination of Marie de' Medici's early years and patronage in France see Howard, 1982, 8-15.
[63] Louis Batiffol, Elsie Finnimore Buckley, and J. E. C. Bodley, *The Century of the Renaissance* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 323.

accordance with the Salic law. The Salic law was a legal code originally composed in the fifth-century CE around the time of Clovis, but readopted around the middle of the fifteenth-century when it was enforced by the French monarchy that women would henceforth be excluded from royal succession.[64] Finally, the French were already weary of a foreign—particularly Italian born—Queen, and Maria also experienced the prejudices of a "somewhat xenophobic court."[65]

In response to these difficulties Marie requested an official coronation, which took place in 1610. King Henri IV died the following day and Maria was declared Queen regent to her son Louis XIII. Although by gaining the regency Maria was able to exploit a tremendous seat of power and authority, regency by definition is "a provisional role, a vicarious position whose power is based on absence and whose legitimacy is derived from the intention to be replaced."[66] Maria's power was tenuous and therefore veiled in a cloak of illegitimacy—a precarious situation that some years later she and Rubens would politicize on the walls of her new Luxembourg palace.

In 1611 Maria began making plans to initiate the construction of a private residence. In England, Bess of Hardwick took advantage of her wealth and status to construct monumental country houses, exploiting their form and function to propagandize her power. Similarly, as a new Queen regent experiencing a new found authority, "the idea of building her own palace both as a retreat and a monument must have been particularly appealing to her."[67] Although the exterior design for the palace was based

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[64] Taylor, 2006, 543-564.
[65] Sara Mamone, "Caterina and Maria: Two Artemisia's on the Throne," in *Women and Power: Caterina and Maria de' Medici—The Return to Florence of Two Queens of France*, ed. Clarice Innocenti (Florence: Mandragora, 2008), 31.
[66] Mamone, 2008, 31.
[67] Marrow, 1982, 11.

upon a traditional French chateau, she desperately sought the visual influence of her childhood home, the Pitti palace. In October of 1611 Maria wrote to her aunt, Christina of Lorraine, requesting the original plans for the Florentine palace. However, in an obvious instance of impatience, the Queen wrote back eight days later to inform her family that she had sent the architect Louis Métezeau to copy the plans himself.[68] This sense of urgency underlines the fact that Maria found it tremendously important to incorporate the visual program of her Italian heritage into her new residential project.

As Marie's son, Louis XIII came of age and into his rightful authority, a significant power struggle began between Queen regent and king. Louis was only nine years old when his father died, leaving behind a child king. Therefore, Marie had exercised a great amount of control in her political role as Queen regent for almost a decade before the king finally exiled her in 1617. Louis, not unlike his mother, was greatly influenced by his court of ministers and advisors, especially chief minister Charles Duke de Luynes, who played an important role in the exile and political demise of Marie.[69] Although her absence from Paris did not entirely halt the construction of Luxembourg Palace, work significantly slowed and it wasn't until her return in 1620 that progress accelerated and decoration plans begun.

A letter from seventeenth century scholar, Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc, dated December 23, 1621, is the first known document to mention Marie de' Medici's interest in Rubens for the commission at Luxembourg.[70] By January of 1622 Rubens arrived at Luxembourg and contracts were immediately signed for both the *Life of Maria* cycle as

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[68] Marrow, 1982, 11-12.
[69] For a comprehensive study on the life and politics of Louis XIII see A. Lloyd Moote, *Louis XIII: The Just* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991).
[70] Saward, 1982, 1.

well as for the lesser-known cycle, which was to be dedicated to the life of her husband, Henri IV. The secondary scholarship on the Medici cycle is immensely vast, and yet scholars continue to debate several key issues that have often produced more questions than concrete answers. Debates concerning choice of subject matter, choice of artist, iconography, the level of patron involvement, and the extent to which the cycle is a product of political propaganda are prevalent throughout the scholarship. Although very little documentation survives that divulge the extent to which Marie involved herself in the iconographical choices or in the overall execution, the following excerpt from Rubens contract suggests that at least in the initial planning stages she very much demanded a significant role. Per the original contract, the artist agreed to the following:

> …to draw and paint with his own hand twenty-four pictures in which shall be represented the histories of the very illustrious life and heroic deeds of the said Queen according to the specifications [in subjects up to the number nineteen] which, as has been said, have been given to the said Sieur de Rubens by the said Majesty [who will transmit to him the other five subjects while he is working on the first ones]…And the said Rubens recognizes that the said lady the Queen has reserved to herself the authority to increase or decrease the subjects of the said pictures before they have begun, and to have those pictures which do not please her retouched and changed once the pictures have been received here.[71]

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[71] Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Rubens' Life of Marie de' Medici* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1970), 97.

Documents such as this have been useful in the attempt to determine the extent to which Marie was involved with her commission and her relationship with Rubens. In Deborah Marrow's major contribution to the art patronage of Marie de' Medici, she traces the argument regarding Marie's role in the design and execution of her life cycle.[72] This is a crucial facet to the scholarship, as an understanding her level of involvement inevitably sheds light on her desire to create a self-fashioned persona through these images.

Wolfgang Stechow, one of the first to comment on this patron/artist relationship, argued that Rubens and Marie were great friends and there are in fact several examples of correspondence that support this notion. In a letter from Rubens' close friend and advisor, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc comments about a situation in which the Queen evidently heard rumors that several painters were plotting against Rubens in an attempt to strong arm the artist into censuring his works. According to Peiresc, her response was that she "cared not for their prattle and that she desired, under pain of her displeasure, that no one should make so bold as to speak to her with sinister intent on the works of Y.W."[73] Furthermore, in 1677 Roger de Piles wrote the following: "The Queen Marie de' Medici took such great pleasure in his conversation that, during all the time he was at work on the two pictures he did in Paris among those for the Luxembourg gallery. Her majesty was always with him, as much charmed at hearing him discourse as at watching him paint."[74] Although I would surmise that the aforementioned statement is rhetorically exaggerated, it is likely that the Queen did afford the artist her time and praises for the

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[72] Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de'Medici* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982).
[73] Thuillier and Foucart, 1967, 115.
[74] Ibid, 134.

work he was doing. However much Marie may have trusted and valued her chosen artist, it is evident that Rubens primarily responded to the iconographical demands of his patron and her advisors.

Although Marie de' Medici was certainly not the first ruler to become memorialized in a life cycle of this sort, this series of paintings is remarkable—and persistently valued—for the fact that she was certainly the first *living* female ruler to ever have commissioned and so actively participated in such an homage to her own life and power. One of the most intriguing arguments in Marie de' Medici scholarship is the debate on the extent to which Rubens' life cycle was created as a political tool of propaganda. Was it created as a means to visually express her political power or to build and strengthen it? In 1944 Otto von Simson argued that the series was created as a result of Marie's weakness at the advice of her advisors, specifically Richelieu and denied the patron any agency in the iconographical message that was ultimately produced.[75] However, in 1970 Jacques and Thuillier disputed this position, claiming instead that Marie was actually a strong willed patron and was far more active in the decision making process of the cycle's design than had been previously credited.[76] This position, which has been largely supported by documentary evidence, has also been subject to later criticism for the fact that they go on to argue for the non-political nature of the commission, relegating it to an expression of classical and literary tradition. Deborah Marrow correctly argues, "Thuillier is correct in rejecting the thesis that Richelieu

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[75] Otto Von Simson, "Richelieu and Rubens: The Significance of Rubens' Commission for the Paintings in the Medici Gallery," *Review of Politics* (1944): 442-51.
[76] Thuillier and Foucart, 1970, 20-30.

controlled the imagery of the cycle and in pointing out the heroic aspects of the series, but he is overly cautious in denying that its goals were political."[77]

Certain aspects surrounding Rubens' charge to paint this cycle are undeniably complicated, specifically in the sense that the artist was "faced with an unprecedented commission from a female ruler to glorify what was contemporary history and to do so without offending the royal son with whom the recently exiled queen mother had just been reconciled."[78] Although I profoundly agree with the scholarly assessment which has identified the political and propagandistic qualities of Marie's life cycle, specifically concerned with rhetorically advertising the queen's newly regained and rightful position of authority upon her return to Paris, scholars such as Susan Saward and Sarah Cohen have made an attempt to look beyond the obvious political implications of iconography. Saward argues that the paintings ought to be viewed through a "consideration of those artistic, literary and political traditions which define an ideal monarchy as a return to the Golden Age."[79] Saward's position is useful in the sense that it sheds light upon the fact that Marie de' Medici, while the Queen regent of France, was too a Medici and the obvious references to her Italian family lineage in her life cycle are undeniable. What then does this say about the identity she was trying to convey in a series of paintings dedicated to the entire spectrum of her life?

Several scholars have discussed the cycle as broken down into three thematic groupings. Each group details a distinct period of Marie's life, in which stability and transformation are juxtaposed. In constructing a cohesive picture of self-identity through

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[77] Marrow, 1982, 55.
[78] Sarah R. Cohen, "Ruben's France: Gender and Personification in the Marie de' Medici Cycle," *The Art Bulletin* 85 (2003): 490.
[79] Saward, 1982, 7.

these images Marie was able to extol the multi-faceted nature of the life she wished to portray—her Medici lineage, her *rightful* and successful claim as the queen of France, and her stoic return from exile.

The first group, which details the birth and youth of the queen, was a period marked by her Italian roots. The second painting in this first group of the cycle is *The Birth of Marie de' Medici* (Fig. 8). The infant Marie is cradled by the personification of her native city, Florence, distinguished by her crown, which bears the symbol of Brunelleschi's dome. Further references to her Florentine heritage include the river-god Arno and two putti, which frolic about a shield bearing the symbol of a fleur-de-lis. The infant is bathed in a glowing light that closely resembles the traditional divine light of religious imagery. Rubens rendered the birth of the Queen in a distinctly celestial manner, thus elevating her initial entrance into the world.

Another significantly propagandistic painting from this group, perhaps even more so than *The Marriage by Proxy*, is *The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici to Henri IV* (Fig. 9). This image is a visual creation of the first moment Henri IV actually laid eyes on his future bride—a wife he would not meet until after their wedding by proxy. Several scholars have engaged in a debate concerning Marie's physical appearance and argued over whether or not the king found his queen appealing. While the viewpoints that argue for her physical beauty and for Henri's attraction to his queen attempt to counteract some of the earlier, harsher arguments that often coupled her physical unattractiveness with her inabilities as a ruler, they often "share a bias with the

stereotypes which they challenge, namely an inability to separate their judgment of Maria as a queen and a patron from her physical appearance and her role as a wife."[80]

The *Presentation of the Portrait* should be considered in this debate because it is the only image in the cycle that is entirely about the king approving his future bride based on her physical appearance rendered through portrait. In this painting Henri is gently encouraged by the personification of France, as they both gaze upon the idealized beauty of the young Medici princess' portrait. The entire scene is presided over by Jupiter and Juno, a common association in pictorial imagery of Roman imperial unions.[81] As Sarah Cohen has claimed in her extensive study on the role of France personified in the overall cycle, France plays a significant role in this painting because she "alludes to the metaphor of the mutual love between king and people and also supplies a hint to how the king will be physically and royally complemented by his prospective queen."[82] It is also a likely scenario that the inclusion of France was valuable to one of the major messages that Marie herself wanted to convey—that she was destined and selected by France to be queen. There are several other examples throughout the cycle that reaffirm this notion of her rightful authority, specifically *The Birth of Louis XIII* (Fig. 10) and *The Coronation of Marie de' Medici at Saint Denis* (Fig. 11). These are the two events in Marie's life that most establish and maintain her rightful claim to the throne.

With both Isabella d' Este and Bess of Hardwick I have discussed. The importance of family dynamics, specifically those with fellow male family members. These dynamics can often reveal motivations behind patterns of female patronage and in

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[80] Marrow, 1982, 2.
[81] For an extensive evaluation of Rubens' use of classical iconography in the Medici Cycle, see Susan Saward, *The Golden Age of Marie de' Medici* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982).
[82] Cohen, 2003, 497.

Marie's case, the precarious relationship that developed between her and her son is not only one of the factors in her desire for this commission, but it is also quite evident in the iconography of the last group in the cycle. Marie initiated this commission upon her return from exile, a period of time in which she likely felt the need to reestablish her political authority in the face of the court and more importantly, to her son. *The Meeting of the Queen with Louis XIII at Angoulême* (Fig. 12) is essentially the symbolic representation of the peace offering from Louis XIII, which was negotiated by Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld. Marie sits upon a throne-like chair, accompanied by Prudentia, who represents the divine protection over the health of the state, and Cardinal de la Valette, who Saward has interpreted as a representation for caution in her decision to accept peace.[83] Marie as the embodiment of peace is a common theme to the last five paintings in the cycle. It is her self-proclaimed statement that upon her re-arrival from exile, peace was restored not only to her family, but also to the state.

Marie de' Medici is included in this study because she is a primary example of the power of imagery in the formation of one's projected identity. In going beyond the traditional presentation of self through typical portraiture, she was able to manipulate the way her entire life was to be viewed. By interweaving both fact and allegorical fictions, Marie and Rubens constructed a "story of the queen's accomplishments, trials and ultimate triumph, accompanied by and even taken over by imaginative figural demonstrations of royal power, exalted emotion, family bonds and chivalric ideals."[84] Although it is now generally accepted among scholars that Marie did exercise a tremendous amount of control on at least the general tone and message of the cycle, we

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[83] Saward, 1982, 166.
[84] Cohen, 2003, 495.

must also appreciate Marie's choice in artist to so effectively create such an extensive

pictorial program to serve and accompany the story Marie was trying to tell.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Around the same time that Joan Kelley was posing the question of women's place in the Renaissance, Stephen Greenblatt was exploring the idea that "perhaps the simplest observation we can make is that in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process."[85] Initially my project was formed on the basis of these two distinct inquiries and the impact that asking such questions with the consideration of female patronage has on the way we look at the monuments that these women respectively commissioned. Having purposefully chosen three women who were each afforded certain degrees of power and positions of leadership, similarities were bound to appear in the messages that were communicated through their works of art. However, Isabella d' Este, Bess of Hardwick and Marie de' Medici were women of different generations, separated by time and place, and most notably held extremely distinct positions of power within their respective families, a point which unexpectedly became an undercurrent of this study and an important aspect in locating self-fashioned identity in their commissions.

In looking at the relationships between female patrons and their family members—both male and female—I have found that in many instances the female patron quite incisively manipulated the power of patronage to not only produce an image which would serve to propagandize her, but also to declare her authority as a successful business person in a business that was traditionally relegated to her male family members. Isabella d' Este is an important model for studying female patronage in early

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[85] Greenblatt, 1980, 2.

modern Europe because she was one of the first well documented female patrons of art, although she was certainly not the first and those that came before her are still understudied.[86]

The inclusion of Isabella in this paper was not simply for a study of her *studiolo* commission as a vehicle for projecting her own constructed sense of identity literally onto the canvas, but to better understand her character as a patron and specifically the way in which she positioned herself among her male family members as a successful, often shrewd, patron of the arts. While attention has been given to the spirit of rivalry among Renaissance artists, there still remains work to be done on competition between patrons within families and courts. As Molly Bourne has rightfully stated, "As scholarship increasingly points to the importance of family dynamics and *clientelismo* as determining factors in Renaissance society, it is becoming evident that each princely court was not a simple reflection of one ruler's personality, but the product of the numerous and often conflicting agendas promoted by a ruler, his consort, and their many dependents."[87]

Of these three patrons, Isabella d' Este and Marie de' Medici experienced the privileges—and problems—of their respective courts. Both women held positions of authority as regent in the absence of their husbands' presence at court. Bess of Hardwick on the other hand did not carry such marital ties, but nevertheless appropriated her wealth and power through marriage. Widows held a unique position in Renaissance society,

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[86] There are three essays dedicated to female patrons in Italy prior to the sixteenth century in *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy,* ed. Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, 95 (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2001). See Benjamin G. Kohl, "Fina da Carrara, née Buzzacarini: Consort, Mother and Patron of Art in Trecento Padua," Rosie Prieto Gilday, "The Women Patrons of Neri di Bicci," and A. Lawrence Jenkins, "Caterina Piccolomini and the Palazzo delle Papesse in Siena."
[87] Bourne, 95, 2001.

while at once they enjoyed a greater sense of autonomy than married women; their positions could potentially be financially precarious. Married four times to increasingly wealthier and more powerful men, Bess married her way to eventually becoming the second wealthiest woman in Elizabethan England—second only to the Queen. Bess is also unlike the other two patrons in this study with respect to her chosen means of expressing self-identity—architecture. It has been well documented that the function of country houses in Renaissance England went well beyond physical accommodation. They were emblems of power, signaling wealth and status—and until Bess their architectural design was traditionally in the hands of the men who commissioned them. By altering the traditional patriarchal form of the grand country house, Bess created for herself a literal, physical space in which she could not only visually express her power, but also in which she could embody it.

One of the questions that should consistently be applied to any patronage study is that of the patron's level of involvement in his or her commissioned work. With both Isabella d' Este and Marie de' Medici the dynamics between patron and artist have here been considered, as well as the extent to which they controlled the plan and execution of the works and the degree of satisfaction with the finished products. Applying these concepts to Bess and her role as a patron of architecture is problematic for several reasons. Scholarship on Bess of Hardwick lacks the extensive documentary evidence that exists for other female patrons. However, at this point in Elizabethan England, architects

were not valued as artists in the sense that we think of them today and we know therefore that the patron did often play a very significant role in the stages of design.[88]

In this sense, how can Hardwick Hall be regarded as an architectural self-portrait of the patron? After four marriages and a lifetime of her well-documented passion for building having been always partially if not fully under the control of a husband, at Hardwick she was afforded a freedom in expression—she could literally announce the importance of her presence, with her initials immortalizing her in stone (Fig. 13). However, it was not only Hardwick Hall—or even solely the structures that she directly played a role in commissioning—that divulges Bess' character as a shrewd and competitive patron. In 1580 Bess' architect-builder, Robert Smythson, began construction on a large and lavish country house for Sir Francis Willoughby, former ward to the Duke of Suffolk and fifty year long friend to Bess. In 1592 Bess' travels took her to Wollaton to see the structure designed by both her friend and her architect. Upon her arrival she was asked for a loan, as Willoughby had fallen on financial hardships. Rather than loaning him the money directly, she secured deeds to various properties, including Wollaton, to be held in her granddaughter Arabella's name. After Willoughby died in 1596 his heirs tried to reclaim the property, but Bess was an intelligent businesswoman and had a lifetime's worth of experience in the legal system, specifically concerning property rights. The property was legally declared for Arabella, which would significantly help her eligibility for marriage. Unlike Isabella d' Este who often expressed a rivalrous nature *with* her family, Bess' competitive character was no less prevalent; she

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[88] For further information on Elizabethan architects see Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Architecture of the Elizabethan Era* (South Brunswick and New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1967).

however seemed more interested in competing *for* the status of her family. As Mark Girouard noted: "She knew what she wanted, and she got it."[89]

In this paper I have chosen to discuss these three patrons in chronological order, although my expectations were not such that I believe time was a significant factor in the mechanics of any given patron in this study. Isabella d' Este has certainly set a precedent for the way in which other female patrons are evaluated, which has prompted a somewhat recent attempt within the scholarship for a more objective look at those that came before and after her. I would argue that individual circumstance is the greatest differing factor worth considering among their products of patronage. Marriage and family are notably common aspects in the procurement of wealth and power for each of these women. Isabella d' Este came from a court family and married into one, just as Marie de' Medici would over a century later. Both experienced periods of regency, and yet despite these commonalities experienced far greater differences in their positions of authority due to circumstance.

Marie de' Medici knew from a young age that the only type of marriage that she desired was a royal marriage. Upon marriage, unlike Isabella or Bess, she was moved from her native country and expected to perform the duties of not only a wife and mother, but of a foreign-born queen in a time and place that distrusted both Italians and women. In propagandizing herself through the patronage of her life cycle Marie did not need the iconographical subtlety of Isabella's visual program, nor was her cycle to be the culmination of a lifetime seeking autonomy in her patronage, like Bess. It needed to have immediate impact upon the viewer.

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[89] Girouard, 1983, 146.

Scholars continue to pursue the mechanics of patronage because it provides insight into the question of why. In the early modern period, when so many of the works of art and architecture that were produced were not solely inventions of an artist's creative will, we are left with: Why was it made, and why was it made this way? For both men and women in the Renaissance, art was often commissioned to purposefully say something about the individual, to convey a constructed message which when fashioned by the patron could record visual evidence of how they wanted to be perceived. For female patrons such as Isabella d' Este, Bess of Hardwick and Marie de' Medici, it is not only the final tangible image that documents the identity they chose to construct, it is the process, the often shrewd participation of each of these women that also contributes to an understanding of them as individuals and as patrons.

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Fig. 1
Mantegna, *Mars and Venus.* 1497. Tempera on Canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 2
Mantegna, Expulsion of the Vices. 1502. Tempera on Canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 3
Perugino, *Battle of Love and Chastity.* 1505. Tempera on Canvas.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 4
Lorenzo Costa, *Coronation of a Woman Poet*. Tempera on Canvas.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 5
Lorenzo Costa, *Comus.* c. 1507. Tempera on Canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris
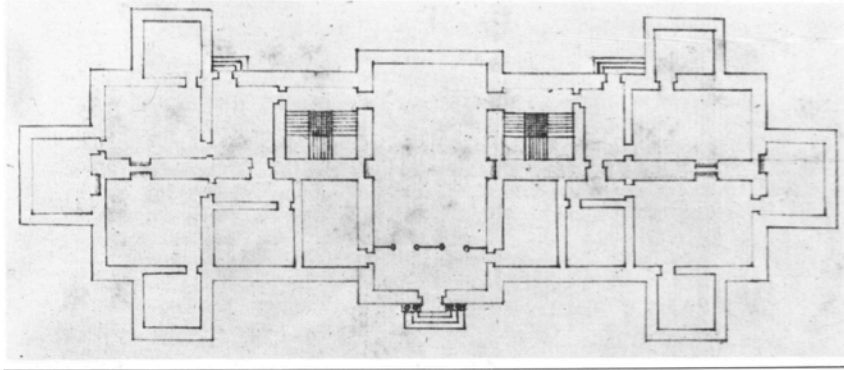
Fig. 6
Robert Smythson. Drawing plan for *Hardwick Hall*. 1590-97.
Derbyshire, England.

Fig. 7
Robert Smythson. Hardwick Hall, exterior view. 1590-97.
Derbyshire, England.

Fig. 8
Peter Paul Rubens. *The Birth of Marie de' Medici*. c. 1622.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 9
Peter Paul Rubens.
The Presentation of the Portrait of Marie de' Medici to Henri IV.
c. 1622. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 10
Peter Paul Rubens. *The Birth of Louis XIII*. c. 1622.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 11
Peter Paul Rubens. *The Coronation of Marie de' Medici at Saint Denis*. c.1622.
Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 12
Peter Paul Rubens.
The Meeting of the Queen with Louis XIII at Angoulême.

Fig. 13
Robert Smythson. Hardwick Hall, detail of exterior view. c.
1622. Derbyshire, England.